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ABSTRACT

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory qualitative study of the implementation of five aspects of the Kentucky Education Reform Act in four rural school districts is now in its fourth year. This paper focuses on findings concerning the first year of the primary program, which was put into widespread operation in 1992-93. Nongraded primary programs are neither a new idea, nor unique to Kentucky, but the Kentucky program is a large-scale attempt to implement such a program statewide. Results from eight rural schools in the four target districts indicate that the most successfully implemented of the previously identified critical attributes of such a program are (1) developmentally appropriate instructional practices; (2) multi-age and multi-ability classrooms; (3) authentic assessment; (4) qualitative reporting methods; (5) professional teamwork; and (6) parent involvement. Least successfully implemented was the seventh identified attribute, continuous progress. A number of difficulties with the program, primarily in the areas of teacher education and teachers' time constraints and work loads, are identified. Most teachers have made an effort in good faith to implement the program and can do so with adequate support. (Contains 12 references.) (SLD)

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A QUALITATIVE LOOK AT KENTUCKY'S PRIMARY PROGRAM: INTERIM FINDINGS FROM A FIVE-YEAR STUDY

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association
New Orleans, LA
April 7, 1994

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A Qualitative Look at Kentucky's Primary Program: Interim Findings from a Five-Year Study

Introduction

Kentucky's nongraded primary program was created by the General Assembly in 1990 as part of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). KERA was developed over 11 months, following a 1989 ruling by the Kentucky Supreme Court that the entire Kentucky common school system was unconstitutional. The resulting re-creation of the schools encompassed curriculum, finance, and governance.

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) qualitative study of the implementation of five aspects of KERA in four rural districts is now in its fourth year. We are studying the primary program, grades 4-12, family resource centers and youth service centers, governance (specifically the school-based decision-making councils), and finance. This paper is focused on our findings concerning the first year of the primary program, which was put into widespread operation in 1992-93.

Nongraded primary programs are not a new educational idea nor are they unique to Kentucky. There was a strong interest in nongradedness in the 1960s and early 1970s, with a resurgence in the 1980s and 1990s (Pavan, 1992b). Other school systems where nongraded programs can be found on varying scales include British Columbia (Calkins, 1992); Oregon (Non-Graded Primary Task Force Report, 1993); Brooklyn (Jarvis, et al., 1990); Maine (Bellemere, et al., 1990); and Houston (Opuni & Koonce, 1992).

Major Findings

1. Seven **critical attributes** (listed below) have been identified by the state as essential to successful implementation of the primary program. Our observations revealed that six of the attributes were being implemented to some degree in most primary classrooms. The same observations suggested that implementing the most complex attribute -- continuous progress -- was more problematic.

    - **Developmentally appropriate instructional practices** were more extensively and enthusiastically implemented by teachers than any of the other critical attributes of the primary program. In nearly every primary classroom we visited, students were engaging in hands-on activities, writing, interactive whole-group instruction, and small group activities. Teachers, students, and parents reported less

textbook work, drill, seatwork, and rote memorization than in the past.

- **Multiage, multiability classrooms** could be found in all schools, in a wide variety of arrangements. The time allocated to such groupings ranged from fulltime to one hour per week. Most teachers, however, continued to categorize students by grade level, and in only a few classrooms did teachers flexibly regroup students.

- **Authentic assessment**, although time-consuming, was being incorporated to some degree. Teachers observed and wrote anecdotal records of student progress, kept logs, compiled student portfolios, collected work samples and journals, and held conferences with parents. Many, however, questioned whether these strategies gave them adequate information about student skill levels.

- **Qualitative reporting methods** had generally replaced traditional report cards. Teachers sent progress reports to parents in the form of checklists and narrative reports at least four times a year. Traditional grades (A-F) were no longer used.

- **Professional teamwork** was increasing. Primary teachers reported more communication, joint planning, and collaboration among themselves and with special education teachers than before.

- **Parent involvement** in the primary program was found at some of the schools we visited. Teachers and parents both said they communicated more frequently with each other than previously.

- **Continuous progress** appeared to be the attribute least successfully implemented. This is the most complex attribute, and many educators appeared to be unaware of its relationship to the other attributes.

2. Primary teachers were under great stress. They needed more assistance with and time for professional development, materials' preparation, student assessment, planning, and collaboration with other teachers.

3. The principal was critical to a successful program. Principals often determined how much training and preparation teachers had, whether or not teachers had common planning periods, how actively parents were involved, and the overall level of support within the school for the primary program.

Our discussion begins with an overview of the law related to the primary program and an explanation of our methodology. Each major finding is then discussed in more detail and illustrated with vignettes and interview excerpts from our field notes.

Overview of the Law

KERA replaces grades K-3 with a nongraded primary program. The philosophy behind the program is that students progress at their own rates without the stigma of early school failure. Implementation of the program began in 1992-93, and the program was to be fully implemented in all elementary schools by the beginning of the 1993-94 school year.

According to Kentucky Department of Education officials, full implementation of the primary program means that seven critical attributes must be addressed to some degree in every primary classroom in the state:

(1) developmentally appropriate practices;
(2) multiage, multiability classrooms;
(3) continuous progress;
(4) authentic assessment;
(5) qualitative reporting methods;
(6) professional teamwork; and
(7) positive parent involvement.

(Each attribute is defined and discussed in the section on findings.) Schools were given the freedom to design programs that addressed these attributes.

The seven critical attributes were designed to enable primary students to achieve six broad learning goals specified in the reform law. These goals have been further defined by 75 learner outcomes, or descriptions of what students should be able to do. A state-level committee of primary teachers studied the six broad goals and 75 learner outcomes, and devised a set of 18 skills that capture the essence of each learning goal and support the best practices of the state's primary program. State regulation identifies these 18 skills as the focus for determining if students have successfully completed the primary program (Kentucky Department of Education, 1993). The 18 skills are:

(1) Express self clearly and effectively in oral and written form;
(2) Process oral and written information as evidenced through listening and reading;
(3) Demonstrate confidence in ability to communicate;
(4) Apply mathematical procedures to problem-solving;
(5) Apply mathematical concepts including computation, measurement, estimation, and geometry;
(6) Collect, display, and interpret data;

(7) Demonstrate use of monetary values in an economic system;
(8) Demonstrate appropriate and relevant investigation skills to solve specific problems in real life situations:
(9) Creatively express ideas and feelings;
(10) Apply democratic principals in relationships with peers;
(11) Identify contributions of diverse individuals, groups, and cultures;
(12) Demonstrate responsibility for personal belongings;
(13) Show respect for the property and rights of others;
(14) Display self-control and self-discipline;
(15) Access appropriate resources for learning in school, at home, and in the community;
(16) Participate in group activities cooperatively;
(17) Choose appropriate processes and strategies to solve given problems;
(18) Apply previously learned knowledge and concepts to new situations. (Kentucky Department of Education, January 1993.)

Recognizing that teachers are still learning how to implement the program and that no children have yet had a full four years in the new primary block, department of education staff have developed an interim process for determining successful completion of the primary program. It assumes that most children will move on to fourth grade at the normal time. If a child needs more time to develop the 18 skills, the department recommends that teachers and parents make that decision together. Districts or schools may follow the department-defined interim process or devise their own method for verifying successful completion.

Eventually, an instrument called the Kentucky Education and Learning Profile (KELP) will be used to track student progress in the primary program. The profile was piloted during the 1992-93 school year and is being field tested during 1993-94.

Methodology

During the 1992-93 school year, AEL researchers studied primary program implementation in eight elementary schools in four rural school districts. (The four districts originally were chosen for study based on geographical location in the state -- two in the east, one central, and one in the west; proximity to researchers' hometowns; and willingness to be included.) Time constraints prohibited a study of the primary program in each school across the four districts, so efforts were concentrated at a central and an outlying school in each district. One district, however, has only one elementary school, so three schools were included from the largest district in the study.

At each of these eight schools, we analyzed the primary action plan (which described the plan for implementing the primary program at that particular school) and identified for observation at least two teachers from two different primary teams, if applicable. (Some schools only had one team.) The identification of teachers for observation depended upon teacher willingness and principal's approval. (We believe that in some cases this resulted in getting a rosier view of the program than we would have gotten from a random selection.) Each teacher was observed for half a day both in the fall and again after Christmas. We interviewed teachers, principals, and parents, using semi-structured interview protocols. Student input was gathered either through interviews or written work assigned by the teacher at our request. If time permitted, we gathered similar data from other schools in the district. In total, across the four districts in 1992-93, we

-- reviewed primary action plans from 12 schools;
-- observed 37 teachers in 10 schools;
-- interviewed 18 parents, 41 primary students, 34 primary teachers, 2 special-area teachers, and 8 principals;
-- collected writing assignments from 44 primary students;
-- observed 13 school-, district-, regional-, or state-level training sessions related to the primary program;
-- observed 6 primary teacher planning meetings;
-- observed 1 primary support group meeting;
-- observed 6 primary orientation programs for parents;
-- observed 8 school council meetings in elementary schools; and
-- observed 5 elementary faculty meetings.

In addition, we interviewed the Kentucky Department of Education deputy commissioner and associate commissioner in charge of the primary program, and consulted the department's director of the Division of Performance Testing.

Our observations are not intended to provide a complete picture of the classrooms we observed; they should be viewed as snapshots in time. Also, these findings are based on observations in only four Kentucky school districts. Although the state had provided funding for early implementation of the program in some KY schools, this was the first year of primary program implementation in each of the districts.

Discussion of Major Findings

We concentrate our discussion on the seven critical attributes. As we visited primary classrooms in the four study districts, we were impressed that most primary teachers addressed, to some degree, the seven critical attributes. We were especially impressed at how much instructional change had occurred. By

contrast, our interviews and observations revealed that one attribute -- continuous progress -- was only marginally addressed. We also discuss the major barriers and facilitators to primary program implementation: time and the role of the principal.

Critical Attributes

Developmentally Appropriate Instructional Practices

> ...instructional practices that address the physical, aesthetic, cognitive, emotional, and social domains of children and that permit them to progress through an integrated curriculum according to their unique learning needs..." (Kentucky Department of Education, 1993, p.15)

Our observations and interviews revealed that teachers were most successful in implementing this critical attribute. In nearly every primary classroom we visited, students engaged in hands-on activities, writing, interactive whole-group instruction, and small-group activities. We saw little paperwork, drill, rote memorization, and textbook work. Students in all but two of the classrooms sat at tables or clusters of desks where they could interact and work together. In most classrooms, students were free to move around the room at least some of the time.

Most of the primary teachers we observed used a variety of approaches to teach basic skills. For example, most teachers taught language arts through a combination of the "Success" or "Sing, Spell, Read, Write" program (both whole language approaches), authentic literature, and writing activities -- supplemented by basal readers. A teacher who had been trained in whole language in college said, "I'm finally teaching the way I was taught to teach!" She commented that she had only used the basals twice (in two months), but that "in some ways we're reinventing the basal with this approach," referring to the teacher-made materials for the authentic literature she was using instead of the basal.

Similarly, most teachers supplemented the math textbook with commercial programs that involved the use of manipulatives and active child involvement (such as "Box It/Bag It"). Some teachers reinforced skills through the use of learning centers. Manipulatives were available in nearly every classroom, and we observed numerous activities using manipulatives. Teachers in one district (which invested substantial dollars in computers) reinforced math and reading skills through daily use of computers. Hands-on science materials and training had been provided to many of the teachers, although some of the teachers allowed the materials to remain on the shelf or used them merely for science demonstrations. We observed several instances of cooperative group or partner activities, such as partner reading, students playing educational games in small groups, or groups

completing and turning in a single product. The following short vignettes give the flavor of life in one of these classrooms:

> In a second year primary skills group (traditionally first grade), children are writing poems about a storm. Some sit at their desks and write. Others walk around and talk to other children about their poems. A little girl asks the teacher how to spell a word. The teacher asks if she has consulted "three before me." The children must consult three other information sources before asking the teacher for information. The child says she tried the dictionary but could not find the word, then asked two other children and they did not know. The teacher helps the little girl sound the word out.
>
> In a third and fourth year primary skills group (with children aged seven through ten), the teacher is beginning a whole group lesson on metric units of measure. A girl raises her hand and points out that an adult observer is in the room and the class should add her measurements to a large graph the class made. The teacher agrees, and two girls, using a tape measure, quickly measure the distance from the observer's nose to the end of her outstretched hand. As the girls add this information to the graph, the teacher explains that this is the way the traditional "yard" was established and the graph shows whether individuals' spans are more or less than the traditional yard. Because most of those who were measured by the students were women, most measured less than three feet. The teacher then goes on to introduce metric units of measure to the class.

Nearly every teacher we observed attempted to integrate the curriculum through theme activities. During our observations, about half of these teachers used themes at times throughout the instructional day to teach concepts and skills in all subject areas. The remaining teachers used a block of time daily to teach thematic units that integrated science, social studies, language arts, math, music, or art activities. A popular theme in the fall was Halloween, and teachers incorporated into their instruction a variety of activities related to the theme, as illustrated in the following vignette:

> During theme time, a teacher asks her multi-age group what each child is planning to do for Halloween. The students mention such things as "trick or treating," but the teacher keeps asking until one girl says she is going to dress up. The teacher exclaims, "Yes, that is what I was trying to get at!" She leads them to talk about dressing up in costumes, which she uses as a pre-reading activity for the book, The Witch Grows Up. She then reads the book aloud to the group. After reading and discussing the book, the teacher shows them a film strip about Druids and Samhain (the Druid's term for Halloween).

In another room the children are coloring jack-o-lanterns with partners. The younger children are paired with the older children in this class. When they finish their jack-o-lanterns, the partners trace each others bodies on white paper on the floor. Then each of them cut their own ghostly image out of the paper.

Across the hall the classroom is empty and the pumpkins that earlier were in the windows are gone. The multiage class is outside with the teacher and an aide. They are carving the pumpkins into real jack-o-lanterns.

Thus, our observations suggest that instruction at the primary level changed substantially in almost every classroom. In many classrooms, the change was dramatic. As the next vignette shows, however, there were some classrooms where traditional instruction continued almost unaltered:

By 10:00 a.m., a group of six- and seven-year-old children have completed their fourth worksheet of the morning, copied their spelling words (used in sentences) off the board, written the numbers from 1 to 100, and colored a picture given to them by the teacher. It is now time for reading, and the six-year-olds get out their basal readers for round robin reading. The teacher asks them questions about the story as they go along and helps them if they stumble on a word. Four seven-year-olds are seated at one side of the classroom, doing different spelling words, working jigsaw puzzles, or staring off into space. The teacher later tells us that she alternates basals and big books with the six-year-olds, and that the seven-year-olds also have a basal reader, but two days a week she gives them "some independence." She says that she uses themes in the afternoon for social studies and science. In the afternoon, pairs of students work on yet another worksheet, although this one ties into the Halloween theme. It is a language arts exercise, however, not social studies or science.

Many teachers reported that they enjoyed teaching more than in the past and that students enjoyed school more. One teacher remarked:

I've never worked harder than I have this year, but I've never enjoyed a year as much as I have this year.... Sometimes we'll be busy working and before I even realize it, it's time for lunch. The days just go by so quickly, and it's really hard to get all of the things crammed into the day that you'd like to do.

A likely explanation for the dramatic changes in instructional practices is that teachers have received extensive training in various new instructional approaches that are compatible with the primary program. In addition, most teachers seemed to agree with the philosophy that active, hands-on instructional

approaches are more developmentally appropriate at the primary level than the textbook-and paperwork-centered approaches of the past. One gifted and talented teacher, however, said that she thought the hands-on work was difficult for gifted children and slowed them down, because they operated on a more abstract plane. Parents we interviewed were also split in their opinions of what one parent termed the new "touch it, feel it, see it" way of teaching. Additional training may be needed not only so teachers can use the innovative teaching methods more effectively, but also so they can communicate the purpose and philosophy behind these methods to parents.

Multiage, Multiability Classrooms

> ...flexible grouping and regrouping of children of different age, sex, and ability who may be assigned to the same teacher(s) for more than one year....(Kentucky Department of Education, 1993, p. 15)

The schools we visited were implementing multiage, multiability classrooms in various ways. Strategies for grouping students differed so much from one school to the next that it is difficult to identify any central tendency, except to say that every school we visited placed students in groups containing children of different ages, abilities, and sexes for at least part of the time. One of the most common arrangements was to place students in multiage, multiability groups for 45 to 60 minutes, three to five days a week, for thematic instruction. Another was to place them in dual-age groups (e.g., 5- and 6-year olds, 6- and 7-year-olds, or 7- and 8-year-olds) for all or part of the day.

It is unclear which grouping patterns will be acceptable to the legislature and the state department of education in the long run. At least one school in one of our study districts grouped the primary students K-3 from the beginning, on the premise that this configuration eventually would be required. In the fall of 1993, however, the principal reported that teachers would like to switch to dual-age grouping because their colleagues from other schools told them this was much easier to manage. In addition, the state department of education had begun sending signals that dual-age grouping was an acceptable long-term grouping pattern. In 1992-93, an elementary school in another district grouped students by skill level for 50-minute periods of reading and math in the mornings, and grouped K-3 students in the afternoon for thematic science and social studies instruction. The school switched to dual-age classrooms all day in 1993-94, reportedly for two reasons: Eliminating the 50-minute periods in the morning allowed teachers more time for subject integration and thematic teaching; and the maturity levels of the students in each classroom were much more similar. The following vignette illustrates one teacher's struggle to make instruction appropriate for students of widely varying maturity:

> The subject in an afternoon science class that includes 6- through 8-year-olds is astronomy. The teacher has turned on an overhead projector and is conducting a lesson on stars and constellations. She takes questions as she explains the overheads to the students. A range of questions are asked, not all of which are on the topic, such as whether or not shoes should be taken off in the gym and what to do with money brought for the Halloween party. Later, the teacher again tries to foster discussion on the topic as she reads aloud portions of The Magic School Bus Lost in the Solar System. The youngest children raise their hands dutifully. When called upon, one boy relates what he wants to be for Halloween, and a girl comments that she saw some Chinese people in town the day before. Finally, the teacher begins to ask each child who has his or her hand raised, "Does this have to do with stars?" If the student says no, the teacher tells him or her to save the question and she moves on to the next upraised hand.

While teachers employed a variety of grouping strategies, they did not seem to use a great deal of flexibility or regrouping once these groups were formed. The most extensive and flexible regrouping we saw was in an open classroom. In this classroom, four teachers mixed 5- through 8-year-olds for almost two hours a day. For the balance of the day, three of these teachers, assisted by the special education teacher, taught the 6- through 8-year-olds, grouping and regrouping about every half hour for various skill activities. Groupings were sometimes based on interest but most of the time were based on skill levels. Students also moved up and down between skill levels frequently during the year. The kindergarten teacher did not participate in this flexible grouping and regrouping. Although teachers at other sites moved students to some degree between skill groups, none did so as frequently or as flexibly as those in this open-classroom team.

In districts with a half-day kindergarten program, many kindergarten teachers were reluctant to spare any time out of the relatively short instructional day for multiage grouping. Teachers in districts with full-day kindergarten said the longer day made it easier to incorporate 5-year-olds into the primary program.

One teacher team said that mixed-age grouping was initially so stressful for some 5-year-olds (who cried excessively) that they limited the time 5-year-olds were mixed with older students. Other teachers reported that initial difficulties were soon overcome. One of these teachers said:

> Personally, I have enjoyed being able to integrate with the older kids. I can see that the older kids are more willing to work with younger ones. They're more tolerant. I think they're learning a lot. I think the younger ones are learning so much from being around the older ones. One of my little ones today closed his eyes and spelled February. I have to stop to spell February. But they've been working on that during calendar time.

Some teachers said they preferred not to have 5-year-olds included in the program. They believed that entry-level students need to spend the first year working on basic self-help, socialization, and readiness skills. Others simply did not wish to work with 5-year-olds. One teacher stated that if she had to take kindergarten students, then she only wanted the ones who were really ready to be integrated because she didn't want to do any "potty training."

We observed two models for incorporating 5-year-olds. One appeared to be more in line with continuous progress than the other. Some schools mixed 5- and 6-year-olds, 5- through 7-year-olds, or 5- through 8-year-olds for an hour or more per day. During this time, activities (such as work at centers, large-group calendar math activities, or work on themed units) were designed so that students could participate at their own levels. The following vignette illustrates this approach:

> Twenty-seven primary students are seated on a large carpeted area in the front of the classroom when the researcher arrives. This class contains students in what would be traditionally referred to as grades K, 1, and 2. It is the first activity of the morning, and the teacher has been leading a discussion of the calendar. The teacher notes that this is the 19th day of the month, and writes a large 19 on a piece of chart paper clipped to the chalkboard. She asks for "incredible equations" with the answer of 19. A girl eagerly raises her hand and suggests (5+5)+10-1. The teacher writes the equation on the chart paper. Using a large counting chart numbered from 1-100 in rows of 10, the teacher checks the girl's equation, explaining the process she is using, and pronounces the equation correct. The next volunteer suggests (9+9)+1, and the equation is again written, checked, and pronounced correct. Several hands have been raised by this time, and students offer equations of varying degrees of complexity: 9+10, 99-80, 19+0, 10+5+3+1, 9+1+10-1, 60-41. One child eagerly offers a series of equations that he apparently worked out before coming to school: 46+86= 132; 132-100=32; 32-20=12; 12+7=19. All equations are enthusiastically received by the teacher, written on the chart, and checked. When incorrect equations are offered, students frequently spot their own errors as the teacher works through the process of checking the equation on the number chart.

The other model mixed 5-year-old students with upper primary students (7- to 8-year-olds) for 90 minutes weekly (typically 30 minutes, three times per week). During this time, the older students acted as tutors to the younger ones, working on various readiness skills. While such activities undoubtedly benefit all students and should not necessarily be discontinued, this model does not facilitate continuous progress as well as the first.

Some parents were concerned about the multiage grouping in the primary program. They worried that either the youngest or the oldest children would absorb so much of the teachers' time that the other students would not get their fair share of instruction. Another parental concern was that students who remained in one classroom for three or four years would not have a sense of progression in their education. One parent's remarks were illustrative of both these apprehensions:

> I wonder if some of the kids aren't going to be slighted somewhere in this primary program. I just have a fear that somebody somewhere along the line is going to be slighted and by the time they find out, it's going to be too late to turn back and correct it... Because when you've got a teacher with that many different grades--and then another thing, whenever they are in first grade, if they go to kindergarten and then they go to first grade, they're still in the same grade [class]. Then they go to the second grade, they feel like they're not getting anywhere.

Authentic Assessment

> ...assessment that occurs continually in the context of the learning environment and reflects actual learning experiences that can be documented through observation, anecdotal records, journals, logs, actual work samples, conferences and other methods....(Kentucky Department of Education, 1993, p. 15)

Teachers told us that they find authentic assessment techniques time-consuming, but most saw their value and were struggling to incorporate them into their daily routines. Many said authentic assessment provided concrete evidence of student progress, which they used to complete progress reports and to explain student progress to parents.

The three most common authentic assessment methods we saw were observation, anecdotal records, and student work samples. Teachers frequently circulated around the room, observing--and occasionally recording--progress, and offering assistance as needed. Most spent out-of-class time to supplement their observations with anecdotal records and student work samples, sometimes keeping portfolios of student work. Some teachers incorporated anecdotal records systematically into their daily routines, while others gave up the practice after finding it too time-consuming and cumbersome. One teacher reported it was taking her two hours every evening to stay caught up with the records, so she switched to just recording in a notebook when a child did something "outstanding." A teacher who had stopped trying to make anecdotal records altogether said that

looking through her students' back work gave her the same information. Another teacher commented:

> If I try another method of anecdotal records this year, I'm going to scream, because none of them are working, and I can't take time to write them. ...I tried three different things, and I'm not happy with any of them.

At a districtwide primary support group meeting in February of 1993, a primary teacher described and displayed her system of keeping anecdotal records. She had an index card for each student, and wrote the students' names on the bottom of the card. Cards were taped to a clipboard, with the bottom card taped on first and the next card taped so that the student's name on the bottom card was exposed. This procedure was followed for all cards so that a flip chart was created. The teacher explained that she took 15-20 minutes after school on days she could stay and recorded comments on at least five students. At the end of the week, she put paper clips on the cards of students she did not comment on that week so she would know to write on these cards on Monday. At the end of the nine-week grading period, cards were placed in student folders to share with parents at conferences. At this school, all teachers were provided substitutes for a half-day twice during the year to enable them to update anecdotal records.

In spite of their efforts to practice authentic assessment, many teachers reported a lack of confidence in the new practices as evaluation measures. These teachers said they could no longer be sure that students had acquired specific skills, because they were no longer following a strict skills sequence set forth in a textbook series. A teacher reported that the primary teachers at her school were administering old reading inventories and standardized tests to their students before the six week progress reports were due. She said that the teachers wanted some assurance that their students were learning the traditional skills even though they had not received traditional instruction. One primary teacher in another district, interviewed in the fall, summarized:

> I **love** it [the primary program], I do. And the kids love it. We're having so much fun. I don't know if they're learning anything, though. It worries me -- really worries me.

In April, however, the same teacher said:

> In the past six weeks, I'm getting to where I can do more authentic assessment. I've been growing. I'm able to look around and see what [the students are] doing.

Qualitative Reporting Methods

> ...communication of progress through a variety of home-school communiques, which address the growth and development of the whole child as s/he progresses through the primary program....(Kentucky Department of Education, 1993, p. 15)

In all four districts, a redesigned primary progress report (or report card) was used to communicate student progress to parents in qualitative ways. The reports enabled teachers to report student progress in terms of progression along a developmental continuum of skills and concepts. Some incorporated space for narrative reports on student achievement. Primary progress reports differed from one district to the next, and even among schools within a district, but all listed individual skills rather than subject areas, and none used traditional A-F letter grades. Parents in all four districts received skill checklists and/or narrative reports at least four times a year.

Developing new methods of reports student progress was time-consuming and frustrating for many teachers. In addition, some teachers reported difficulty adapting to the new grading categories. The two interview excerpts that follow illustrate these difficulties:

> A teacher at one school complains about the confusion over the checklist that is sent home to parents. At first, the principal simply gave the teachers the checklist he wanted them to use. They used it for the first grading period, but were very dissatisfied with it and complained about not being consulted. The principal turned the responsibility for developing the checklist over to the teachers. The teachers compared checklists that they had gathered from other schools and workshops and chose one after much debate. When one of the teachers produced yet another example that some teachers liked better, the process began again. The teachers ultimately developed a checklist that consisted of bits and pieces of several checklists. The teacher being interviewed describes the result as "pathetic," and says the teachers in charge didn't even bother to retype it, although she offered to do that for them. They simply photocopied the cut and paste job, so the document was in several different typefaces and was also "blurry." She believes that there should be just one checklist in use statewide. Since this is not the case, however, she thinks the teachers ought to be willing to put in the time to develop a document that they could be proud of rather than just hurriedly slapping something together.
>
> When asked what she thinks of the new primary progress report, a primary teacher [from a different district] replies "It tells a lot and it doesn't tell a lot." She notes that the highest grade on the report card is S, and she comments, "I want to give an S+ so bad I can't hardly stand it for some of

those that really, really, work." She says she used S+ some at the beginning of the year and then stopped, explaining to students that "S means you're doing the very best you can; you are not compared to anybody else, you're doing great." She mentions that it takes a long time to fill out the new progress reports:

> It's a lot to fill out, especially if you do some writing on the end, and all the parents like that -- I know I do. The first thing I look at on my kids' report card is what did you say about them, in her own writing. There's a lot to check off. It's really good, it covers it all.

When asked if she has had trouble understanding the meaning of any of the skills and categories listed on the progress report, she replies, "Oh, no, it's spelled right out." She says she especially likes the behavior part of the progress report. She comments that she has gotten no feedback on the progress report, either negative or positive, from parents or students.

In addition to progress reports, almost all primary plans called for two parent-teacher conferences each year, during which teachers were to share qualitative data with parents. Conferences gave parents a chance to review student work because at some schools teachers were keeping all student work in a portfolio in the classroom rather than sending it home. Some teachers communicated via weekly notes to parents, also, and some teachers sent interim progress reports to supplement the quarterly reports.

Some of the primary parents were upset that their children no longer received letter grades, while others felt the checklist and narrative reporting told them much more about their children's progress than did a single letter grade. One parent opposed to the new reporting method commented that she was afraid students would lose their motivation and quit working if the goal of grades was removed:

> One thing I don't like at all is this new report card thing, the new grading on the younger ones. Because last year, the first nine weeks [my child] was on the honor roll. Of course, that's something to be proud of. But then the second nine weeks he works just as hard, but then they can't be on the honor roll no more. And I think they lose the incentive to try hard because they, you know, you work hard and work hard and then you don't seem like you're getting anywhere. Just like yesterday, he got his report card and he got all S's.

Professional Teamwork

> ...all professional staff in the primary school program communicate and plan on a regular basis and use a variety of instructional delivery systems such as team teaching and collaborative teaching....(Kentucky Department of Education, 1993, p. 15)

We found collaborative planning occurring among primary teachers at some schools. At a minimum, such planning centered around thematic units, and some teachers also planned for grouping and regrouping of students. Team teaching (two or more teachers working together to teach units of instruction) was occurring at only two schools, but some degree of collaborative or team teaching between regular and special education teachers was occurring in every school we visited. In addition, even in schools where teachers did not plan together often, teachers said they were communicating with one another informally more so than in the past. One teacher commented:

> I think the greatest thing that this [the primary program] has done for us as teachers is to get us to share with each other and to lean on each other more. Because before, we were just our own little room and we did our own little thing and "Nobody else better do what I did!" ... And now, it's "How did you do that?" or "Have you got a good idea for this?" And I think, really, that's the best thing it has done for us. We've really been a team and we've done so many things this year together as a team, and it has really been great.

Although professional teamwork was occurring in most of the schools we visited, teachers were severely limited by time and scheduling. Only about half the study schools scheduled time into the school day for common planning among teams of teachers who shared the same students (these teacher/student groups were called "families"), and this generally occurred while students were in special areas classes, such as art or physical education. At a few schools, teachers planned together after school, while some teachers did not plan together at all. Even where joint planning time was available during the day, many teachers reported less team planning in the spring than in the fall, either because thematic unit planning was complete or because family units had been abandoned. Teachers who did plan together sometimes had difficulty making efficient use of their time, as we observed during one planning meeting:

> The Character Education teacher is setting up the VCR in a primary classroom as students from that "family" enter and take seats on the floor. The three teachers of the family exit the room after the students are settled and sit at tables in the computer area. They are joined by two student teachers and planning time begins. The unit they are planning centers around a Native American theme. Ideas that teachers discuss include: doing math with money bead necklaces by assigning different values to specific shapes and colors of beads; having children construct Native American houses at one center, money necklaces at a second center, and headdresses at a third. Teachers suggest personal books or tapes that they could bring in to use during the unit. A student teacher is interested in using Indian feathers to teach counting by twos. As the discussion

progresses, the theme idea changes to Harvest, which teachers feel could include Native Americans, especially in conjunction with Thanksgiving. Teachers suggest making vegetable soup and cornbread with their students to teach a variety of skills: sequencing of the procedures, measurements in the recipes, sorting vegetables by textures and color, graphing of how many students liked each kind of vegetable, maybe even a little science on wheat seeds and how they are ground into flour (for the cornbread). Making pancakes is the next idea thrown out for discussion, and one teacher suggests making the pancakes in the shape of the children's initials so they could be used for letter recognition. This teacher really wants to do pancakes because she has a wonderful story involving pancakes. Another teacher murmurs, "I wanted to do something with popcorn," and she grabs a resource book and thumbs through it. Another teacher reminds the group that the original theme was Native Americans and suggests that they return to that theme. The teachers say that popcorn was a Native American crop, but they are stumped on how to fit in the pancakes. A teacher says she thinks the Indians baked a flat bread on a rock, which could be related to pancakes. The planning period ends with no final decision made, but with many ideas aired.

During 1992-93, special area teachers (art, music, physical education, and library) were not involved in team planning at any school we visited (although some primary teachers reported that art and music teachers linked some of their instruction to classroom themes). One school, however, changed the schedule for 1993-94 to allow every teacher weekly collaborative planning time with special area teachers during the school day.

Another aspect of professional teamwork was the reduction of pullout programs for special education. At some schools, the special teachers (remedial reading, speech, gifted and talented, and special education) came into the classroom once a week or more to work with the entire class, while pulling their students out on other days. Some primary families had a special education teacher as part of the family, so there was no pullout at all. One of these teachers explained how special education students benefited from this aspect of the primary program:

> I taught special ed[ucation] for 15 years. I know that my special ed[ucation] kids are being exposed to and seeing more than they ever did in a strictly resource room. Skillwise, which they're saying is not the important thing anymore, they may not be getting as many "bl," "cl," "st" lessons; but they're being exposed to Christmas in Mexico; they're being exposed to amphibians in a frog and toad unit -- stuff that they didn't get last year. ...They're strictly a part of the group. They're not seen as special ed[ucation] kids. ...They might leave once a week to go be tested for just a few minutes, but

there's so many other kids coming in and out now and then, going to speech, gifted and talented, or you know, the office. ...Whereas before they'd leave in the morning, and the kids wouldn't see them until lunch time. They were gone all day practically.

Positive Parent Involvement

...the establishment of productive relationships between the school and the home, individuals, or groups that enhance communication, promote understanding, and increase opportunities for children to experience success in the primary program.... (Kentucky Department of Education, 1993, pp. 15-16)

Most of the schools we visited were seeking to increase communication with parents. Almost all schools provided some type of parent orientation to the primary program early in the year. Teachers in all schools made an effort to send frequent progress reports to parents. Some supplemented these with narrative reports. A few teachers also sent weekly or monthly class newsletters. Teachers in most schools made an effort to hold conferences with parents about twice during the 1992-93 school year. Students were included in these conferences in at least one school.

In three of the districts, most of the schools had some form of parent-teacher organization in place pre-KERA. Some teachers gave homework assignments that required parental participation. A parent commented on this:

They've started sending homework sheets home with them, and you help them with that, and I like that, because the parent is involved ... and I do know more what they're doing.

In addition to increasing home-school communication, some schools made an effort to actively involve parents. Three of the schools we studied had very active, well-organized parent volunteer programs (one pre-KERA). These programs usually included a parent lounge and a staff member to coordinate the program. Some schools without such programs asked parents to assist teachers in the classrooms and to make materials for teachers. Parents at some schools made materials at home in the evening and sent them to school for use in the classroom.

The principal at a school where we saw parents observing in classrooms remarked that parents who observed their children's activities liked what they saw. She said that these parents were interpreting the program positively to parents who had not observed the program. In this school, the general understanding was that parents were welcome to observe any activity. We

observed teachers not only welcoming parents but including them in class discussions.

In another district, we interviewed parents from two schools that represented the opposite ends of the parent involvement spectrum. At the principal's urging, one school employed several strategies to increase parent involvement: A Meet-the-Teacher night at the beginning of each year; a parent room and parent volunteer program; two parent/teacher/student conference nights per year; and a "Be a KERA kid" night during which parents of primary students are taught lessons similar to what their children experience during the day. Parents at this school were positive about the primary program and expressed confidence in teachers' ability to implement it.

At a second school in the district, there was practically no parent involvement in the primary program, a situation that seemed to stem largely from the head teacher's fears about parents coming into the school. His comments illustrated his misgivings about having parents involved:

> So far, it has been very limited. An excuse for this is we have been trying to get this kindergarten established and I have been discussing with my kindergarten teacher--primary teacher--the possibility of bringing in some parent volunteers. My biggest concern there is when you open it up to volunteers, you have no control over who volunteers. Up until this time, I have not felt like it was worth getting into.

This attitude was not lost on parents. We interviewed three parents with primary-aged children at this school. All three said that the school held no primary orientation program for parents, although a program was held for parents of kindergarten students. Parents at this school were suspicious and distrustful of both the school and the primary program. A parent related this story:

> My older kids have been down there with [the primary teacher], so the first day of school, I went down there and said, "Well, I'd like to see how it's [the primary program] set up." [She replied,] "Well, what are you interested in?" I said, "I just want to see what's there for the kindergarten." [She replied,] "Well, it's not like you haven't been down here before." She said that, and I was starting to get hot. I said, "Well, it's not like they've been down here before for kindergarten. This is new. My kids haven't been here for kindergarten." Well, she walked me on in and I got about a ten-minute look because so-and-so was up in the front crying and she had to go take care of it. I realize she may have been a little on edge the first day of school and maybe I shouldn't have asked that day, but I

thought, "Well, I would like to see what it looks like in there", you know, and all I could see were the few little centers and the carpet square.

Continuous Progress

> ...a student's unique progression through the primary school program at his/her own rate without comparison to the rate of others or consideration of the number of years in school. Retention and promotion with[in] the primary school program are not compatible with continuous progress" (Kentucky Department of Education, 1993, p. 15).

While many teachers were leading activities that allowed for continuous progress, most had not fully incorporated a continuous progress model into their thinking, practices, and vocabulary. This was evident in the labeling of students. Students in nearly every room we visited retained their designation as kindergartners, or first-, second- or third-graders. In a few cases, students were referred to as P1s, P2s, P3s, and P4s ("P" for "primar[illegible]). Nearly all students we interviewed identified themselves by grade level. Stu[illegible]nts in multiage classrooms were clearly aware of who was in which grade. Teachers in these rooms often differentiated among the grade groups. The following vignette illustrates teachers' labeling of students during an activity that ostensibly allowed continuous progress:

> In a multiage classroom, the children are on the floor to observe a science experiment. This involves making three holes in a milk carton at different levels, covering the holes with tape, filling the milk carton with water, and removing the tape. The object is for students to predict where the longest stream of water comes from: the top, middle, or bottom hole. The students decide what materials they will need for the experiment, and the teacher writes these on a paper in front of the group. They already have "water" and "carton" and are just getting "nail." The teacher asks them what else they need and they come up with "tape" to cover the holes.
>
> The teacher asks, "Do I have a P2 who will read this?" A little boy does, and he reads very well. The teacher only helps him with "nail." She asks, "Do I have a P1 who can read this?" A little girl volunteers. She reads "water" but can't read the remaining words. The teacher helps her and the girl smiles and seems pleased.
>
> Before she opens the holes, the teacher has all the children make predictions. There is a big piece of paper in front headed: A, B, C, D. If they predict the longest stream will come from the top hole, the children are to put a small cut-out of a carton by A on the chart. B signifies the middle hole, C signifies the bottom hole, and D signifies the three streams will be

the same length. The teacher tells them, "Think back to when we studied water pressure, and pick which one you think will happen."

Most of the kids vote for A, predicting that the longest stream will come from the top hole. The first child chooses that one, and the others seem to follow her lead. When the teacher pulls the cover off the holes, the longest stream comes out at C, but the children all yell A, which goes along with their guesses.

The problem was not merely one of terminology. In many cases, students were tracked in ability groups or grade groups for most of the school day. In almost all instances students were grouped by grade or skill level for language arts and mathematics instruction. In several instances, teachers had two age groups in the same classroom but continued to teach them separately, giving different instruction and different assignments to the groups. For example, one teacher we observed, who had both 5- and 6-year-olds, labeled them "tulips" and "roses." She gave them the same worksheet and told the tulips to write sentences and the roses to write letters. (In a continuous progress model, students would write letters, words, and/or sentences, according to their capability rather than ages or grades.) In addition, we observed a classroom of 5- through 7-year-olds in which only the 5-year-olds were allowed to use centers, only the 6-year-olds were asked to copy certain exercises from the board each day, and only the 6- and 7-year-olds were allowed to use the computer. Many multiage classrooms were operating like split classes rather than continuous progress classes.

Teachers' inability to manage continuous progress was reflected in comments from parents. For instance, the parent of a kindergarten student reported initial excitement over KERA because she thought it would bring about individualized instruction, which would enable her very bright son to work at his own pace and level. She indicated in 1992-93 that this had not yet occurred and she speculated that the primary teacher was spending more time with slower students who may not have had the same nursery school experience as her son. She reported that her son was not moving ahead as fast as she believed he was capable of doing. Her son was enrolled in a half-day kindergarten program, and she was considering switching schools to enable him to attend all day so he could learn more.

To us, continuous progress is more crucial than the other attributes because it embodies the underlying philosophy of the primary program. The objective of a "nongraded" primary program is to provide a school structure that enables all children to progress through the primary years at their own rate without experiencing early school failure. This objective is based on the understanding that children learn at different rates and through different learning styles, and that they learn best as they develop a sense of self-confidence as the result of successful learning experiences. In our opinion, continuous progress is the crux of

the primary program, and the other six attributes help ensure that continuous progress is achieved, documented, and reported.

Admittedly, continuous progress is a difficult concept to put into practice, because it essentially requires teachers to individualize instruction for a group of 20-25 students, often without the benefit of extra classroom assistants or extra planning time. In addition, much of the training primary teachers have received has focused on instructional practices or other single attributes of the primary program, rather than on providing a holistic view of how all the attributes work together. State department officials report they initially emphasized developmentally appropriate practices, authentic assessment, and qualitative reporting, because successful implementation of these attributes will move teachers toward a continuous progress philosophy.

Successful Primary Program Implementation: Barriers and Facilitators

Our study of primary classrooms suggests two factors important to successful implementation of the primary program: easing the teachers' work load and having a supportive principal.

Teacher work load

Teachers reported that **time** was the major barrier to successful primary program. At all schools we visited, principals and primary teachers told us that they need more time and help. Several aspects of the primary program require teachers to devote more time to their jobs than ever before.

Many teachers completed three times their required number of professional development hours in an attempt to prepare themselves for the new methods associated with the primary program. The new methods themselves require primary teachers to continually prepare and update materials for centers, whole language, hands-on math and science, and ever-changing thematic units. Authentic assessment requires much more time than keeping grade books and filling out report cards. Teachers spend time preparing narrative reports on student progress to send home. Parent conferences have required preparation time on the part of teachers, as well as time spent in the actual conference. Teachers are required to plan collaboratively with other primary teachers, special education teachers, and special-area teachers. This planning often has to be done before or after school. On at least one occasion we observed directly that teachers were putting in lots of extra hours, as reported in the following vignette:

> On an October afternoon in 1992, an elementary school dismissed at 2:55 p.m. Members of the Purple team are found in the teachers' lounge preparing a letter to send to parents. They report that they held a planning

meeting after school the day before. They finish writing their letter at 4:30 p.m. and return to their classrooms to set up for the next day. The Orange team also is still at school at 4:30 p.m., planning for the next week. They say they also have to plan for the fall festival. Only two teachers on the Green Team stay late today, planning informally together. One teacher says she stayed to grade papers. Both teachers are preparing materials and their rooms for the next day. At 5:45 p.m., nine of the primary teachers are still at school. Only one of the regular primary teachers -- who has small children at home -- and two substitute teachers have left.

Teachers at all schools reported frustration at trying to do so much in such a short period of time with so little help, and some gave up trying to implement some parts of the program. Collaborative planning with other teachers was particularly difficult for many. Instructional aides and parents assisted teachers at some schools, but few teachers had full-time aides and some teachers had no aides at all. Teachers reported that they had no time for their families and their lives outside the classroom.

A primary teacher said that the stress was causing teachers to become "surly with each other," and she described a recent evening of work: She was at the school until 4:30 or 5:00 p.m. and took home a stack of papers on which she had to write comments. She worked on them before and after supper (which her husband cooked), finally falling asleep on the couch at 8:00 p.m. Her husband awakened her at 9:30 p.m. to tell her to go to bed. She did, but awakened at 3:00 a.m. worrying about what she was going to do with her class that day. "This is how it's been all along," she said plaintively.

At a primary support meeting in February of 1993, one teacher told his colleagues:

> What really concerns me is that we're going to be so accountable for these students, yet they keep expecting more and more from us and offering us less and less. I've been a very positive person but for some reason this week, I've become just about broke[n]. You just feel like they keep adding more and more stuff on you, and I think we're going to have to get to the point where we can say, "Hey, stop! Enough is enough." I've slowly started realizing this. I took my plan book and threw it away. I said, "I'm not doing this, I don't have time." I think we've got to start looking at how we're going to survive. I've heard too many people say, "I'm going to quit teaching," and we shouldn't feel that way. This new program shouldn't get us to the point where we're contemplating another profession.

The time requirements of the primary program had a strong effect on another aspect of KERA: school-based decision making (SBDM). At some elementary

schools in our study districts, no primary teachers were on school councils because they believed they could not spare the necessary time. At non-SBDM schools, teachers said they had not implemented SBDM because they did not have time to serve on councils; and they feared the primary program would not be sufficiently represented.

School principal

While principals at most schools we visited gave considerable support to the primary program and enabled the teachers to implement the program reasonably well, it was evident from the extremes we observed that the principal plays a pivotal role in determining how effectively the program is implemented.

Two of the three **most** supportive principals we observed received extensive training in the primary program, and all three exerted direct leadership in helping teachers prepare the school's primary program plan -- including scheduling as much individual and group planning time as possible for primary staff. In at least two schools, these principals were regarded by their staffs as experts on KERA. These three principals were also experts at finding additional resources or using current funding to ensure that primary teachers received the training and materials they needed. One principal provided substitutes for any primary or intermediate teachers in the building who wanted to spend two days observing a nongraded school in another state.

Once the primary program was underway, these principals monitored the program frequently, identified problem areas, and tried to alleviate problems. For example, one principal hired substitute teachers for two half-days to give primary teachers time to work on authentic student assessment. The same principal did daily "walk-throughs" to obtain a quick view of the primary classrooms, and modeled appropriate instructional practices for primary teachers at their request. This principal was aware of the stress created for primary teachers when she prodded them to implement the program:

> I think they think I'm pushing them, but I hope they know I love them. ...I'm trying to do it in a non-threatening way. ... This year I've tried to pull back a lot and present the image that I still believe there are some things kids need to know traditionally, but why can't we try to teach them in a fun, exciting, innovative way? I'm sure some [of the teachers]... wish I'd slow down. But I try to tell them we don't have the luxury of being able to sit around for two years to do it.

Two teachers made these combined comments on this principal:

> I think our principal has just opened our eyes and said, "This is out there, you can get it, take it". She has gone and asked the administration for money for things again and again and again. And she knows her stuff; I mean that must be her pastime, is reading up on KERA and knowing what to do... She makes sure that the fourth grade knows what the third grade is doing so that the transition will take place and run smoothly; and the fifth grade knows and the sixth grade knows. Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade are all on our primary committees. Parents are, too.

The two **least** supportive principals we observed engaged in such behaviors as failing to provide common planning time for teachers on the same primary team, avoiding the primary area of the school, avoiding training about the primary program, discouraging parents from visiting or volunteering in the school, allowing teachers to avoid those aspects of the primary program they found problematic (for instance, inclusion of five-year-olds in the program or anecdotal recordkeeping), allowing teachers to choose their own teams (leading to cliques or to concentration of the best, most enthusiastic teachers in just one primary team), and assigning students to teachers without teacher input. Teachers in schools led by these principals were considerably less enthused about the primary program, and our observations suggested that the program was being implemented less effectively in these schools.

An example of this was found at a very small school led by a head teacher who teaches 7th and 8th grades. (There are only four teachers: K-2, 3-4, 5-6, and 7-8.) The head teacher reported in 1992-93 that the only training he had received in the primary program were the state-sponsored primary institutes, which he thought were a waste of time. When asked if primary teachers had talked with him about any problems they were experiencing with the primary program, he laughed and said the teachers stay too busy to talk to him. He later said he was too busy as a classroom teacher and head teacher to spend much time in the primary program.

The school is served by a P.E. teacher for an hour each morning. Each class receives only 15 minutes of P.E. -- a very short planning period for teachers. In 1992-93, the two primary teachers sent their classes to P.E. together, which gave them a 30 minute joint planning period. When we visited in 1993-94, however, the primary teachers reported that they no longer have joint planning because the head teacher's son had complained that his P.E. class was too large. The head teacher insisted that the two teachers send their classes to P.E. individually, resulting in each teacher having only 15 minutes planning, and at separate times. The K-2 teacher remarked that the entire primary program was disrupted because of the head teacher trying to satisfy his own son. The primary teachers related this tale resentfully as they ate lunch together, something they said they were not supposed to be doing.

Conclusions

Most primary teachers appeared to have made a good start on implementing the nuts and bolts of the primary program. It is not surprising that they were focusing on the component parts rather than the big picture, given the magnitude of the task and the focus on components in their training. The literature on nongradedness, however, emphasizes that the change from graded to nongraded programs is a philosophical and cultural change, not simply a grouping scheme or a single innovation (Calkins, 1992; Pavan, 1992a). Some of the implementation problems we observed may stem from teachers' failure to understand the rationale behind the primary program (Surbeck, 1992).

Knowing how long it takes to implement major innovations -- Anderson (1993) cautions that nongraded schools take about five years to launch -- we were not alarmed that problems existed. For instance, most teachers continued to categorize and think of students by grade level, most seemed to be struggling to learn new methods for monitoring skill acquisition, some schools still needed to figure out how to establish productive relationships with the home and parents, the teacher workload was intolerable for more than a short time, and many seemed to have not yet fully grasped the concept of continuous progress.

In spite of these problems, a great deal was accomplished in a very short time. With only a year for study and preparation, primary teachers devised different ways of addressing the seven critical attributes -- many of which were highly effective. A recent report on a day-and-a-half discussion among researchers, consultants, and policy analysts studying KERA implementation summarized "remarkably consistent conclusions" that

> a tremendous amount of activity has occurred in a very short period -- far more than skeptical outside observers anticipated. Changes are visible at all levels of the education system and there is continuing strong and broad public support for the reforms. The major challenges are created by KERA's main strength -- its comprehensive, interconnected nature. Since everything cannot happen at once, how is it possible to get all of the pieces into place and build the capacity to implement KERA? (David, 1993, p. 1).

The question is apropos to the primary program: What is needed to ensure the continuing evolution of a continuous-progress primary program? Pavan (1992b) cited adequate staff development and sufficient implementation time as necessary for success of nongraded programs. Gaustad (1992) warned that teaching multiage classes requires more teacher preparation time, and this has proven true in Kentucky. A number of traditional solutions would undoubtedly ease teachers' burdens considerably if the state or districts could find the funding to support them: providing a fulltime instructional aide for every primary teacher, giving at least one hour of daily planning time to each primary teacher and

regular joint planning time for groups of teachers during the school day, and extending teachers' work year at both ends to give them paid time for planning and preparation.

Education Commissioner Thomas Boysen suggested another possibility: provide appropriate resource materials to educators to support new ways of teaching and of organizing schools. He pointed out that Kentucky is moving from a "cellular curriculum" in which "the teacher was supported by a textbook which was set up in lesson-size pieces." He went on to say:

> We're now dealing with questions, issues, themes, and experiences that touch the hearts and minds of children. Unfortunately, the instructional resource material infrastructure is not available. That is why teachers are staying up late planning lessons and scrounging for materials. We cannot solve the workload problem until we solve the instructional resource problem (personal communication, April 26, 1993).

Boysen reported that the state department of education is trying to address this problem. Three projects are underway to develop instructional resource materials to assist teachers. Boysen also felt that the Kentucky Early Learning Profile should help solve some of the teachers' time problems.

We cannot say with assurance exactly what it will take to successfully implement the primary program without exhausting the system's human resources. If state department staff can rapidly develop the instructional resource and assessment materials described by Boysen, this could ease teacher workload and stress considerably, but only if teachers are given training in the use of the new materials and planning time to incorporate them into their existing instruction. Given that state department staff are as overburdened as primary teachers, however, it is unlikely that enough materials can be produced to relieve teachers' burdens significantly during the coming school year. It will be very difficult to provide additional resources during a time of financial hardship for state government, but creative solutions to this problem are urgently needed at the state, district, and school levels.

It is clear from our observations and interviews that most primary teachers have made a good faith effort to implement the primary program, and are capable of effectively doing so if they're given proper assistance and support. The spirit expressed by one primary teacher suggests ways in which Kentucky educators are effectively coping with the demands of change:

> We starting hearing about all these new programs and strategies,and we jumped in and went "whole hog" without adequate training or time to organize. I tried to teach like that for a year and a half, spending up to 38 hours per week in addition to class time in preparation. In the meantime, I

also spent a month at the hospital with Daddy. I reached the point that I thought, "I'm going to snap. I'm trying to do too much too fast. I don't feel adequately trained. I don't see the end results coming out of my students that I want to see." So during Christmas break, I said, "Uh-uh, this isn't going to cut it. If I'm ready to snap I'm not giving my best to the students, and I'm not able to get their best out of them." So I had to revamp, and in January I took the best of the old methods that I knew would work for me, and combined them with the best of the new methods that were working for me. There were still some ideas which sounded good to me that I would like to try, but I didn't feel ready or competent to incorporate them at that time. Those things will have to wait for now. I'm using my own mesh of the old and the new, and when I can add more, I will.

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